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While working at a fast paced reference desk at a busy community college, a librarian may encounter many challenging questions and situations. One such problem that may exist on a community college level is that of the very needy student, who not only has issues with information literacy, but with reading competency and computer literacy. The question is: " on what on level is the librarian responsible for remediating the student in a the brief and confining limitations of the reference interview?" This paper seeks to explore the role of the librarian as he or she relates to remediation and reference assistance.

Key words: Reference Librarian, Remediation, Higher Education, Library Science, Academic Librarian, User Services

The Remediation "Problem" and the Librarian's Role

There is a surprisingly lack of literature on librarianship and the role of remediation. Yet it is a challenge that is so commonly faced by academic librarians everywhere. There are varying skill levels of students, and each reference interaction needs to be treated uniquely and with care. However, there are limitations and restrictions librarians need to face and expectations they need to meet.

Stall (2018, p. 31) states," How has the role of reference librarianship changed? More accurately perhaps, how is the role of reference librarianship changing? While the physical desk still exists, albeit in a reduced function, information professionals are continually endeavoring to reach patrons beyond the methods of the past." Indeed, as Stall agrees, the face of reference librarianship has changed. The incorporation of technology in librarianship has drastically changed the way librarians and patrons approach information. Technology now is not an option; it is essential to navigate in the world. Yet, there are so many patrons who lack computer literacy.

An article by Lascar (2002, p.47) says, "Are first-time freshmen ready to learn information literacy skills, or do they require computer literacy instruction first? Secondarily, do their age, ethnicity and gender contribute at all to our understanding of their computer literacy?" Computer literacy is one type of skill that is essential to use the library. Lascar's inquiries concern the challenges of remediation and competency, which influence the students' ability to properly utilize library resources and conduct a fruitful search for their assignments..

There is a fine line which the reference librarian must be cognizant of. On one hand, they must be attentive to the research needs all students who seek help. On the other hand, they should be vigilant within the confines of time limitation and resources, to help the student navigate issues of even the most rudimentary competency of technology and information gathering. While the latter is not the primary responsibility, the cross-over of remedial skills into reference is inevitable. The question remains of how to go about dealing with this transdisciplinary challenges.

Gross (2005, p. 155) explains in her article on low-level information seeking,

Competency theory suggests that people who function at a low level of skill lack the metacognitive ability to recognize their own incompetence and are unable to accurately assess the skill levels of others. Therefore, they tend to overestimate their own abilities and to proceed with confidence as they develop awkward strategies and make poor decisions. Worse still, because the incompetent do not know they are incompetent, they may be unlikely to seek training or skill-remediation services.

The unlikeliness of the student to seek training or remediation may be exacerbated by the degree of which the reference librarian fulfills the tasks for the student. As a result, librarians maybe performing a disservice to the student by hindering the student's self-insight into their own needs, if they are too "generous" with performing search tasks.

There should ideally be a brief reference interview conducted by the reference librarian, preceding a help session with a student. In this brief interview, the librarian may assess the needs and abilities of the student. The challenges to assessing questions and answers may appear daunting, as various factors may obscure what the student believes he or she needs.

When conducting a reference interview, the librarian should assess the requirements of an assignment, the degree of proficiency of research that the patron possesses, the comprehension of information-seeking protocol, and finally the ability to utilize the technology. These factors can be determined by a series of direct and succinct questions that cause the student to react in a non-defensive, non-threatened manner, so that they can see clear what their strengths and weaknesses are. It is unlikely that students will reveal their perceived incompetence in certain areas.

The Role of Remediation in Higher Education

Librarian Thomas (2000, p.47) explains, "Community college libraries need to address the problems of disenfranchised, impoverished, and disadvantaged Americans. Community college students, who tend to be older, poorer, and have greater responsibilities than traditional college students, tend also to have a greater need for developmental and remedial programming." This being said, Librarians roles can be viewed by those in favor of remediation as being more vital. However, the intervention in remedial skills in a reference interaction may occur too late. Nevertheless, some believe the librarian bears responsibility for both answering the research question and also responding the needs of remediation. The librarian can most definitely teach certain things, but in other ways may be ineffectual regarding remediation. Many teaching faculty are poorly trained to handle remediation, so why should librarians be any different?

When addressing the historical influences of higher education, Rose (2009, pp.2-4) mentions that, "The history of American higher education is one of expansion: in the beginning, the sons of elite families, later the sons of the middle class, then the daughters, the American poor, the immigrant poor, veterans with less-than-privileged educations, the racially segregated." He goes onto to say that over the years, a degree of equality has settled over the landscape, and he interestingly points to remediation as having a role in this diversity. He says, "The remedial function, then, has served to democratize postsecondary education." (2009, p.2)

While some look at the role of remediation as a last educational bastion of equality, others look at it as a series of failures. It is evident that only a small percentage of community colleges required that full-time faculty have specific training in assessment techniques for remedial courses. The growing number of

students requiring remediation necessitates faculty who are committed to students and who have various pedagogical approaches.

Shields and O'Dwyer (2017, p.85) cite that remedial education is an obstacle for students to graduate as stated:

> Remedial education is one of the many factors implicated in low college graduation rates. These basic skills courses, also referred to as developmental education, are intended to help unprepared students achieve a higher education credential. Instead, for some, they present an insurmountable obstacle, such that students in remedial education finish college at lower rates than their peers (T. W. Bailey,2009; Ross et al.,2012 qtd in Shields and O'Dwyer). Overall, only 39% of students who take remedial college courses complete a degree, compared with 57% of those who take no remedial courses. The problem is also widespread. Fifty percent of students take at least one postsecondary remedial course, according to college transcript data, and the proportion is higher at community colleges (65%), as well as among Black and Hispanic students (60%) 62%). Although both remediation and graduation rates vary widely from one institution to another, the relationship between individuals experiences in remedial education and institutional context is not well understood.

If one agrees with the theory that remediation is actually a hindrance rather than a helpful part of education, the librarian's role becomes slightly more clarified. Yet, it is unlikely that community colleges will dispense with remedial classes any time soon. Therefore, librarians are obligated to uphold the curriculum despite the assumption that addressing remedial concerns are secondary.

As stated, the role of remediation in higher education is slightly unfocused, and the literature written about librarianship and remediation is sparse.

The Librarian's Unique Skill Sets

In an effort to provide both reference service and remediation, librarians can act as connection to other tutoring services including the school's learning and writing centers. How time management may be an issue. Unfortunately, many students wait until very late to seek counsel on their research. If their remedial skills are particularly poor, the pressures may be even more challenging.

A Librarian and assistant professor, Filbert (2016, pp.199-202) explains, "Librarianship is inherently a transdisciplinary vocation. Functioning as a nexus of information resources and literacy instruction for diverse communities, disciplines, businesses, and patrons, librarians must possess the know-how of utilizing manifold technologies, vocabularies and discourses, media, and styles to help participants discover, discern, and deploy the best resources for a given need." The transdisciplinary relationship of librarianship to other skills demonstrates and increasing responsibility on the part of librarians to do what no other academic is in the position to do- to span the spectrum of cognitive development and information management and organization. This seems to be a tall order. After all, what can be expected of library professional who has limited time, limited knowledge of the students and their learning styles, timely deadlines and pressures, and limited resources? In many ways, it can be an opportunity for librarians to prove their worth in these testy times. As quoted in *Academic Librarian: Singing in the Rain (2010)*, the role of the academic librarian is dynamic and they have seen "the emergence of composite, hybrid and blended library and information professionals in the

context of a converged, diffuse and expansive global information landscape." As a result, the librarians connect with varying skill sets and must navigate the ever morphing landscape of information in their teaching and in their service of reference. "The contemporary landscape includes overlapping roles, broad skillsets, stretched identities, specialized niches and competency gaps in strategic specialties."

Educational expert Mike Rose (2009, pp.3-4) discusses the significance of remediation in higher ed, "remediation, despite its negative reputation, is both a historically appropriate function of higher education and intimately interconnected with its foundational concerns." In Rose's article, he argues that remediation is not only helpful, but an essential duty of higher education. One may infer from Mr. Rose's comments that this includes the work of librarians. After all, librarians share or should share the same "intimately interconnected foundational concerns." as teaching faculty.

While the debate on remediation in college is highly contentious, there still remains a gap of knowledge that needs to be bridged in order for the student to grasp the higher order of learning model. Some blame the high schools, while others see it as the colleges responsibility to bring students up to speed. Few would argue that the job falls on the reference librarian. The librarians fall into two camps: one that will take whatever amount of time or effort to help the student complete the assignment, and the other that sees the student beyond immediate repair to adequately complete even the most basic assignment. Each side has it's a valid point of view. Yet, ultimately it must be realized that remediation by librarians is just too time consuming, impractical, and costly to be effective. This does not mean that the reference librarian should dispense with all attempts to help the low functioning patron, but there needs to be a discernment between the best use of the time should be spent.

The question of whether there should be investment in remedial education at all in a higher education setting is independent of library services, yet the decision ultimately trickles downhill to the services librarians offer. There is significantly less information written about remediation. Going back to an article in 2001, where the issue of remediation continued to plague community colleges and like, the authors Saxon and Boylan, (2001) state that, "Proposals abound on how to approach the efficient delivery of college-level remediation. Some suggestions include privatizing remedial education services or even passing remediation costs back to high school districts. A few states have actually relegated all remediation to community colleges where it is assumed that its delivery may be less expensive."

Ultimately, the emphasis of this paper is intended to fall more on the librarians role in a reference transaction then on the legitimacy of remediation. There are several venues through which librarians outreach to students. Information literacy, the reference desk, virtual chat reference such as QuestionPoint, reference by telephone, by email, by twitter, Facebook, Gmail chat, and one on one sessions are all viable methods used to provide answers to research. Inevitably, at as a community college library, the questions that are asked of librarians very often do not fall into the category as research. Librarians answers questions about directions, PowerPoints, word documents, pdfs, printers, copiers, course advisement, writing and outlining papers, all make up the gamut that is the usual activity for a community college librarian such as this researcher. One would naturally be able to imagine myriad adversity towards finding the appropriate response for the patrons, particularly the remedially challenged.

Is there a correct answer to dealing with remediation and library reference? Perhaps, no. There are factors, reference styles, timing, and other limitations. Yet, librarians cannot help but be helpful in a moment of focus. Each approach to reference is beneficial, despite the role of remediation being split into two camps. Also, it should be mentioned that reference styles largely depend on the culture of the library. Obviously, the same approach to reference would not be appropriate in a research institution as at a community college. Like much of library service, the style needs to be tailored according to the circumstances. Indeed, this is not only true librarian, but in pedagogy in general. Librarianship does not exist in vacuum. Academic librarianship is meant to work synergistically with regular instruction to work towards the student's benefit,

The question of remediation in higher education remains an issue for administrative pedagogues. Reference librarians appear to be caught in the jet stream of evolving higher educational procedures and traditional responsibilities. Combined with the increasing reliance on technology and the changing face of librarianship, the reference librarian protocol is in jeopardy of losing its relevance. Yet, many students seem to rely on face to face interaction to seek out help for their assignments. Remediation or not, librarians still have an obligation to assist in the management of research and information.

There has been rumination about the possible decline of library services due to technological advances. This argument has been thwarted again and again by the growing development of innovative services. While remediation can be a difficult issue to navigate, it is just one of the many loopholes that librarians have dealt with using innovative and creative workshops, lessons, and reference styles. One librarian may offer certificate classes while another may offer reference help in the form of a "party" with refreshments and last-minute info sessions as has been the case at this researcher's library, Queensborough Community College.

Librarians appear to be a proactive breed and bend in the wind of change. The future of remediation or their increasing less reliance on developmental classes provides daunting tasks to librarians, yet they meet the challenges with positive results. The role of remediation in the library reference services can either be described at as a nuisance or a teachable moment. Nevertheless, the profession of library science is one that is constant flux. In order to provide the most effective outreach to students, it is necessary that librarians stay abreast of administrative changes in curriculum and this includes serving on boards and committees that deal with sensitive issues such as remediation. With the appropriate information, the effective implementation of innovative methods, and the adaption of librarians to provide a high level of productivity and service, the librarian can work well with any patron.

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